

I oppose loosening the rules designed to promote and protect diversity of media ownership. These rules were adopted to ensure that the public would receive a diverse range of viewpoints from the media, and not simply the opinions of a handful of media conglomerates.

Commissioner Powell, can you hear me? You want some "empirical evidence" of the deleterious effect of media consolidation? Try THIS, from today's NJ Bergen Record:

January 29, 2003 Wednesday All Editions  
Peace ads deemed not ready for prime time;  
Comcast refuses to air activists' spots during State of Union address

North Jersey Media Group  
JEFF PILLETS, TRENTON BUREAU

New Jersey peace protesters who planned to air antiwar commercials during President Bush's State of the Union address found themselves summarily muzzled Tuesday by the nation's largest cable television company.

Representatives of the Princeton-based Coalition for Peace Action said a lawyer from Comcast Corp. called them Tuesday morning to explain that the cable conglomerate was pulling six 30-second ads produced by the peace group this month.

Comcast had already accepted \$5,000 in payment for the ads and agreed to air them during CNN programs for three consecutive evenings in the Washington, D.C., market, where the protesters were hoping to get the attention of lawmakers. The group said the cable company made clear it would refund the money, but members were still frustrated and were consulting their lawyer Tuesday. "I was under the impression that we enjoy freedom of speech in this country," said the Rev. Robert Moore, a United Church of Christ minister who is executive director of the peace group. "Those ads are nothing more than the heartfelt feelings of intelligent American citizens who happen to believe that war is not a good idea."

Comcast issued a brief statement Tuesday afternoon stating it pulled the commercials because it could not "substantiate" certain claims made in the ads, claims that it did not specify.

"Comcast runs advertisements from many sources representing a wide range of viewpoints, pro and con, on numerous issues of importance to the public," said the statement, signed by Mitchell Schmale, a public relations officer. "However, we must decline to run any spot that fails to substantiate certain claims or charges. In our view, this spot raises such questions."

Schmale did not respond to requests for further comment.

The commercials, titled "War and Peace," feature residents of the Princeton area expressing their reasons for opposing war in Iraq. In a separate statement Tuesday, Moore said, "The inspections have shown at least two key assertions of the Bush administration to be false: aluminum tubes obtained by Iraq were not for nuclear weapons purposes, and Iraq is not within six months of getting a nuclear weapon."

"Since when does a television station become the arbiter of what is true or not?" asked Moore. "There are all kinds of claims on television made by

corporate sponsors for all sorts of products and services. Is Comcast investigating all of those?"

Comcast provides cable television service to more than 21 million customers in 41 states, including New Jersey.